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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1259
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4095
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1910
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1775
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2344
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000984

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB
PLEASE PASS TO USTDA DAN STEIN
ENERGY FOR EKIMOFF/THOMPSON
COMMERCE FOR HUEPER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2018

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BROKEN WATER PUMP LEAVES
TURKMENBASHY DRY AND THREATENS DRILLING OPERATIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia R. Curran for reasons 1.4(B) and (D).

11. (C) Most of Balkan Province, including the Caspian port city of Turkmenbashy, has not had access to fresh water for at least a week, according to the country manager of Wintershall, Cal Sandhu (strictly protect). Sandhu claims that the explanation he has received is that a pump on the main line that takes water from Ashgabat to Turkmenbashy has broken down somewhere east of Balkanabat City (Nebitdag). The authorities do not have replacement parts, with the result that the entire water line has been closed down at least since late last week. According to Sandhu, water levels in storage tanks and reservoirs around the city -- including those belonging to the government, port authority and private entities -- are all well below emergency levels. Yet, according to the director of the now-closed American Corner in Turkmenbashy, to date, there have been no public announcements telling people what is happening.

12. (C) In Wintershall's case, the Maersk Explorer, which is conducting exploratory drilling for Wintershall, is down to seven-day water reserves. On shore, villas that Wintershall is renting for the duration of the drilling are down to four-day reserves. Those Turkmenbashy citizens without access to water storage tanks have not been able to shower for days, and the only drinking water that is available is bottled. Authorities appear stumped about how to deal with the very real state of emergency. In order to keep drilling operations from falling behind, Sandhu is seeking to bring water from Baku aboard two large water tankers -- at a cost of nearly \$100,000. Up to now, however, he has been running into bureaucratic red tape from Turkmen officials unwilling to process the necessary letters of invitation and customs forms expeditiously, claiming that they have never been asked to make such allowances before.

13. (C) COMMENT: Under normal conditions, it is easy to lose sight of just how unprepared Turkmen officials are to deal with emergencies. Most officials do not engage in contingency planning, which is considered here to be an

admission that operations are less than perfect. As a result, when something happens, they normally do not know how to begin addressing the problem. Despite the lack of public acknowledgment of the water problem, we expect the news will get out sooner, rather than later: Turkmenbasy is the premier summer vacation destination in Turkmenistan and the gateway city to Turkmenistan's much-hyped Avaza tourist zone.

In this case, at least a few heads could roll once news of this fiasco hits the president's office. END COMMENT.

CURRAN